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NRC SEEKS ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON SAFETY SIGNIFICANCE OF DAVIS-BESSE PUMP PROBLEM

The NRC staff has asked for additional information from FirstEnergy Nuclear Operating Company to determine the safety significance of a design problem with high pressure emergency cooling system pumps at the Davis-Besse Nuclear Power Station, located near Oak Harbor, Ohio.

In October of last year, the utility discovered the design deficiency which could affect the high pressure injection pumps under certain accident conditions. These pumps would provide cooling water to the reactor during a loss-of-coolant accident in which the pressure in the reactor remained high. Other pumps would be available at lower reactor pressures.

If required to operate for an extended period, the pumps would recirculate water that collected in the bottom of the reactor containment. The water may contain debris that could affect the pumps because of the design deficiency, resulting in excessive vibration or overheating.

NRC inspection findings are evaluated using a four-level scale of safety significance, ranging from "green" for a finding of very low significance, through "white" and "yellow" to "red," for a finding of high safety significance.

The NRC's preliminary evaluation determined that the safety significance of the pump problem was "greater than green," meaning that the design deficiency involved more than very low safety significance. However, the analysis varied greatly depending on the assumptions used.

As a result, the NRC staff has provided the utility with the opportunity to provide additional information which would permit a more refined analysis of the safety significance. FirstEnergy may also request a meeting, called a regulatory conference, to discuss the safety significance.

The NRC staff will consider any additional information submitted by FirstEnergy in making its final determination of the safety significance of the high pressure injection pump issue.

FirstEnergy is planning to modify the two high pressure injection pumps to correct the design deficiency before any decision on whether or not the plant may resume operations. The NRC staff must approve restart of the plant, which has been shut down since February of last year.

The letter to the utility on the safety significance will be available from the NRC's Region III Office of Public Affairs and in the NRC's online document library, known as ADAMS, at <http://www.nrc.gov/reading-rm/adams/web-based.html> – enter the accession number ML032810667 in the search box. Assistance in using the ADAMS online library is available from the NRC's Public Document Room staff at 800/397-4209

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